

Women's Issues

Since being elected to Congress, Rep. Eshoo has championed the interests of women throughout the country and around the world on the most significant social, economic, and health issues across the public policy spectrum. Rep. Eshoo has fought to open the doors of opportunity for women and girls in school and work, and advocated for equitable pay, tougher child support enforcement, and family-friendly workplaces. Rep. Eshoo is especially proud of her work to promote women's health initiatives and protect victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Rep. Eshoo is a member of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, which works in a bipartisan manner to improve the lives of women and families.

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Related Resources:

House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Democratic website

Equal Rights Advocates

National Women's Law Center

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Sexual Health Education

The United States has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the industrialized world: 34 percent of American young women become pregnant at least once before the age of 20; eight of ten teenage pregnancies are unintended. Although birth rates for U.S. teens have dropped in recent years, in 2004 more than ten percent of all U.S. births were to teenage mothers.

Rep. Eshoo believes Congress has a responsibility to present honest, fact-based sexual health education information to our nation's youth, and to ensure that they have access to appropriate counseling and care for issues affecting their reproductive health.

In Fiscal Year 2007, abstinence-only sexual health education programs received \$177 million in federal funds. However, a report prepared by the House Government Reform Committee's minority staff in 2005 illustrates that commonly used abstinence-only curricula are rife with scientific inaccuracies, factual errors, and troubling biases. Specifically, the report found that curricula used by over two-thirds of federally funded community-based abstinence grantees "contain false, misleading or distorted information about reproductive health."

Rep. Eshoo has consistently supported funding for comprehensive sexual health education programs that include complete and medically accurate information about contraception and sexually transmitted disease (STD) and HIV prevention strategies, including abstinence. In March 2006, Rep. Eshoo urged the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee to include language in their FY07 appropriations bill ensuring that federally funded abstinence-only programs provide medically accurate information.

President Bush's Fiscal Year 2008 budget includes \$204 million for abstinence-only programs, an increase of \$27 million.

Rep. Eshoo's letter against medically inaccurate Abstinence-Only Programs

Government Reform Committee Report on Abstinence-Only Programs

CRS Report on Abstinence Education Programs

Access to Domestic Family Planning Services

Widespread use of birth control continues to be a critical component of basic preventive health care for women and has been the driving force in reducing national rates of unintended pregnancies, STD infections, and abortions.

The National Family Planning Program, created in 1970 as Title X of the Public Health Services Act, provides grants to public and private non-profit agencies to provide voluntary family planning services for individuals who are otherwise ineligible for medical services. Title X serves over five million low-income women at 4,500 clinics nationwide, providing high-quality contraceptive services and other preventive health care services including: contraceptive and infertility services, gynecological care, screening for STDs, breast and cervical cancers, and reproductive health counseling, education and referrals.

Title X is the only federal program devoted solely to family planning and related preventive health services, and it is one of the nation's best and most cost-effective public health success stories: for every public dollar invested in family planning services, three dollars are saved in Medicaid costs for pregnancy and newborn care alone. In 2004, Title X funded clinics provided 2.8 million pap tests, 2.7 million breast exams, 5.4 million STD screenings, and 530,569 HIV tests.

In March 2006, Rep. Eshoo urged the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee to include \$375 million for Title X in their Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations bill. For Fiscal Year 2008, President Bush has again proposed to freeze Title X funding at \$283 million.

Rep. Eshoo's letter supporting the Title X Family Planning Program

CRS Report on the Title X Family Planning Program

International Family Planning

International family planning assistance programs operate in over 140 countries, with more than 50 programs operating in the developing world. Voluntary family planning programs have been proven to help promote safe motherhood initiatives, combat sexual violence against women, diagnose and treat STDs and help prevent the transmission of new cases of HIV/AIDS and other STDs.

Rep. Eshoo has consistently supported efforts to increase funding for international family planning programs. In March 2006 Rep. Eshoo urged the Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee to increase funding for voluntary international family planning programs in the FY07 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act. The President's Fiscal Year 2008 budget proposal requests just \$301 million for international family planning programs, representing a 25 percent reduction from FY07 funding levels.

Rep. Eshoo's letter supporting international family planning programs

CRS Report on International Family Planning Programs

Protecting a Woman's Right to Choose

Until the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, abortions were illegal, but obtainable at high financial, personal, and health costs. If a woman could afford an illegal abortion, it was generally unsafe and many abortions resulted in death or sterility. Before *Roe*, an estimated 100,000 illegal abortions were performed in California each year. Abortion was the most common single cause of maternal deaths in California prior to 1973. Today, women are entitled under the law to a safe abortion and they must comply with restrictions that have become part of some state laws since 1973.

On April 18, 2007, the Supreme Court ruled in *Gonzales v. Carhart* and *Gonzales v. Planned Parenthood Federation of America* that a federal ban on abortion, which outlaws certain second-trimester abortions, is Constitutional. For the first time since *Roe v. Wade*, the Court has banned a specific procedure without an exception for the life or health of the woman, effectively overturning a key aspect of *Roe* without acknowledging so. The Court's decision marks a drastic departure from precedent and substitutes the medical judgment of the Court, Congress and State Legislatures over that of obstetrician-gynecologists.

Rep. Eshoo has consistently supported a woman's legal right to opt for, or against, an abortion. The decision is private, it's a matter of faith, it's a matter of conscience, and our Constitution recognizes this.

That's why Rep. Eshoo is proud to be a cosponsor of H.R. 1974, the Freedom of Choice Act of 2007, which states that all women have the right to a legal, safe abortion if they so choose. The legislation states that individuals, not the federal government, have the Constitutionally-protected right to make their own medical decisions in consultation with their doctors. The legislation also places the focus on women's health and ensures that women nationwide have the information they need to make educated decisions regarding their health and the health of their families.

Rep. Eshoo also believes we have to do more to lower the number of abortions in our country. Key to this is to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies. Rep. Eshoo has consistently supported legislation that enhances family planning programs, and to have medically accurate information included in any federally-funded abstinence-only education program. She has also supported reforming adoption and foster care policies to make these options real and practical alternatives to abortion.

Rep. Eshoo is an original cosponsor of H.R. 1074, the Reducing the Need for Abortions and Supporting Parents Act, which will create programs to prevent teen pregnancy, expand Medicaid eligibility for family planning services, combat sexual assault and expand adoptions programs.

For more information about reproductive health issues:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Guttmacher Institute

U.S. Agency for International Development

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

COMBATting VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

First passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000, VAWA is landmark legislation that has improved criminal justice and community-based responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in the United States. VAWA programs target domestic violence, strengthen services for victims and their dependents, and hold offenders accountable. But the statistics remain alarming: nearly one in four women experiences at least one physical assault by a partner during her adulthood. It is absolutely critical that Congress renew and expand the protections and programs that are so necessary to ending domestic violence.

On September 28, 2005, Rep. Eshoo voted for H.R. 3402, the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005. This bill passed the House by a vote of 415 to 4, and was subsequently passed by the Senate. H.R. 3402 was signed into law by President Bush on January 5, 2006 (P.L. 109-162)

On February 5, 2007, President Bush released his Fiscal Year 2008 budget proposal, which cut funding for VAWA programs by nearly ten percent. The President's budget requested \$370 million for VAWA, \$20 million short of what the program needs to maintain the current level of services. Without proper funding, VAWA programs will not be able to protect victims, promote prevention or educate program participants.

Rep. Eshoo is very disappointed that the Administration has not made it a priority to protect battered women and their families by fully funding VAWA. Rep. Eshoo has seen first-hand in our communities what the impact is of these dollars on individual lives, and she will continue to fight for full funding of VAWA.

For more information about violence against women:

U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. Victims are young children, teenagers, men and women. According to the U.S. Department of State, approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims annually are trafficked across international borders worldwide; between 14,500 and 17,500 of those victims are trafficked into the United States.

Rep. Eshoo was an original cosponsor of H.R. 2620, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003, which was signed into law on December 19, 2003 (P.L. 108-193). This important legislation revitalized programs that combat trafficking of persons, especially into the sex trade, through prevention, prosecution and enforcement against traffickers, and through protection and assistance to victims of trafficking.

CRS Report on Human Trafficking

For more information about human trafficking:

HumanTrafficking.Org

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

U.S. Department of State Global Issues

EQUAL RIGHTSEqual Rights Amendment

Since our nation's founding, the absence of a statement of equality for women under the Constitution has been an issue of significant debate. During the drafting of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John, "In the new code of laws, remember the ladies and do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the

husbands."

More than two centuries later, a Constitutional guarantee of equal rights for women still doesn't exist.

In the 110th Congress, Rep. Eshoo is proud to cosponsor legislation H. J. Res. 40, proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States granting equal rights for women.

FAIRNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Family Medical Leave Act

As a working mother, Rep. Eshoo knows the struggle many Americans endure when balancing work with the needs of their families. That balance can be difficult and even impossible to maintain when one's own health, or that of a family member, is compromised. Prior to the passage of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993 (P.L. 103-3), employees sometimes jeopardized their continued employment to take time away from work to deal with health-related matters.

Rep. Eshoo was proud to vote for this landmark legislation, which guarantees eligible employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the following reasons: to care for one's own serious health condition, or that of one's child, spouse or parent; to care for a newborn, newly adopted, or newly placed foster child; and upon the birth or placement of an adopted or foster child.

Americans should not have to choose between paying their bills and staying home with a sick parent or child, and Rep. Eshoo is committed to continue fighting on behalf of families.

Paycheck Fairness Act

Many of today's working women are the primary or sole breadwinners for their families. Alarming, statistics from as recently as 2004 indicate that women in the workplace earn between 73 and 75 cents for every dollar earned by men. The gap is even greater for minority women. The wage gap is not just a woman's issue, but also a family issue. Rep. Eshoo believes that women deserve equal pay for their work.

Rep. Eshoo is a proud cosponsor of legislation (H.R. 1338, the Paycheck Fairness Act) that strengthens the Equal Pay Act of 1938 to provide more effective remedies to women who are not being paid equal wages for doing equal work. Specifically, the legislation gives the Department of Labor the opportunity to enhance outreach and training programs to work with employers to eliminate pay disparities. The bill allows employees to share salary information with their coworkers and allows women to sue for punitive damages in addition to compensatory damages now available under the Equal Pay Act.

H.R. 1338 also creates a new program to help strengthen the negotiation skills of women, and reinstates the Equal Pay Matters Initiative. Established by President Clinton in 2000, the Equal Pay Matters Initiative was designed to provide women with information and resources that offered opportunities to put women on par with their male counterparts when it comes to pay and occupational choice. The Initiative was eliminated by the Bush Administration in 2002.

CRS Report on Pay Equity